

## Socio-Cultural Aspects of the Society as Depicted in the *Ubhayābhisārikā*

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### ABSTRACT

Sanskrit literature abounds with a lot of literary works dealing with the divinity, myths, beliefs, customs and royalty. Considering the *Rāmāyana* and the *Mahābhārata* as a source, the most popular works have been composed in Sanskrit literature. Kālidasa, Bhavabhūti, Bhāsa are the great poets of all times because of their artistic articulation and outstanding innovative adjoins of themes based on the great books. Apart from these works, poets like Śūdraka, Daṇḍin, Kṣemendra receive acclaim for their courage to depict the lives of the common people of society. Unfortunately, the amount of these kinds of works in Sanskrit can be counted on the fingers. Comparison to other forms of *rūpaka*, *bhāṇa* has possessed the specialty that its theme can depict the experiences of the lower section of society. In Sanskrit literature, there are sources to know the royalty, but inadequate sources to know the lives of common people. The litterateurs portrayed the society of their time through their works that had been experienced by them through different means. *Bhāṇa* is that kind of literary form where the society had been reflected through a variety of characters embracing a large sphere of society. The characters had been created by the writers through whom the socio-cultural aspects of life had been depicted and narrated. In the long run, the *bhāṇa* kind of *rūpaka* gradually lost its grip perhaps due to the monotonous content and some other reasons. As because the numbers and volumes of the narratives are very small to understand the various aspects of the life of the people of ancient society, the proper study of the *bhāṇas* may give an idea of the life and social structure of that society. In this paper, an attempt has been made to analyse the socio-cultural aspects of the society exhibited in the *Ubhayābhisārikā*.

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*Bhāṇa* is one of ten types of *rūpaka*. The features of *bhāṇa* have been stated by the Sanskrit dramatists in their works of dramaturgy. The writer of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Bharatamauni defines *bhāṇa* as it should be conveyed by one person, depending on two things—either it describes one's own experience or is characterised by the descriptions related to other persons. One should enact the words of another person employing retorts, originating in oneself and progressively strung together, as well as by verbal gestures and *ākāśabhāṣitai*, i.e., voices spoken in the air. It should be set forth by a roguish parasite in one act,

and consist of many and varied situations and movements.<sup>2</sup>

*Caturbhāṇīs* the collection of four *bhāṇas* viz., *Padmaprābhṛtaka* of Śūdraka,

<sup>2</sup>ātmanubhūtaśaṁsīparasaṁśrayavarṇanāviśeṣastu /  
dvividhāśrayo hi bhāṇovijñeyastvekahāryaśca //  
paravacanamātmasaṁstamprativacanairuttarottaragrathitai  
ḥ /  
ākāśapuruṣakathitairṅgavikāirabhinayaiścaiva //  
dhūrtaviṭasaṁprajyōnānāvasthāntarātmakaścaiva /  
ekāṅkobahuceṣṭaḥsatatamkāryobudhairbhāṇaḥ //  
*bhāṇasyāpi* hi nikhilāmlakṣaṇamuktaṁtathāgamānugatam  
/.....//*Nāṭyaśāstra*,  
Part III, XVIII.108-111

*Dhūrtaviṭasamvāda* of Īśvaradatta, *Ubhayābhicārikā* of Vararuci and *Pādatāḍitaka* of Śyāmilaka. In the introduction of the *Caturbhāṇī*, the editor quotes a verse of unknown critic, which affirms the authorship of these *bhāṇas*. The *Ubhayābhicārikā* is *abhāṇa* kind of *rūpaka*. The plot of the *bhāṇa* centers around the reunion of Nārāyaṇadattā and Kuberadatta. Here, Viṭa works as a conciliator to arrange the reunion of hero and heroine.

### Drama:

The *Ubhayābhicārikābhāṇa* brings light on a unique kind of drama called *Saṅgītaka*. As defined in the *Candrakalā-vidyotini* commentary of the *Kādambarī*, *Saṅgītaka* is a dramatic work performed through dance, music and song<sup>3</sup>. In the *bhāṇa*, *Saṅgītaka* named *Madanāradhana* is performed in the temple of Lord Nārāyaṇa<sup>4</sup>. The performance of *Saṅgītaka* named *Purandaravijaya*<sup>5</sup> reflects that in the royal palaces also cultural programs were organized. The courtesans were actively engaged with the performances of the *Saṅgītaka*. For instance, while wandering in the street, Viṭa meets two courtesans viz., Devadattā and Priyaṅgusenā who were busy preparing for their performance in the *PurandaravijayaSaṅgītaka*.<sup>6</sup> Bāṇabhaṭṭa in his *Kādambarī* cites many references of *Saṅgītaka*. King Śūdraka often took part in *Saṅgītaka* by playing *mṛdaṅga*<sup>7</sup>. Author Śūdraka mentions *Saṅgītakaśālā* i.e., the house used for the performance of *Saṅgītaka*<sup>8</sup>. In the very beginning of the *Mṛcchakaṭika*, Sūtradhārā announces the accomplishment of *Saṅgītaka* after singing the songs of the summer season<sup>9</sup>. This special kind of musical play marks the popularity of dance, drama and music at the age of the *Ubhayābhicārikābhāṇa*.

### Music:

The *Ubhayābhicārikābhāṇa* marks the popularity of music in those days especially through *Saṅgītaka* i.e. a

concert or musical entertainment<sup>10</sup>. For amusement, people used to sing and play musical instruments. In the *Ubhayābhicārikā*, there is a character named Viśvāvasu who is a Vīṇācārya i.e., an expert lute player. Viśvāvasu used to sing along with plying of *vīṇā*. In a scene, he is portrayed as playing the lute and humming a song in *kākalī* tone<sup>11</sup>. According to the *Amarakośa*, *kākalī* is a sweet and indistinct tone<sup>12</sup>.

### Dance:

Viṭa praises Priyaṅgusenā for her proficiency in dancing. He compliments Priyaṅgusenā explaining every posture of her physique. For Viṭa, she has accomplished in the four kinds of *abhinaya* i.e., acting, thirty-two kinds of *hastapracāra* i.e., hand gestures, eighteen kinds of *nirīkṣaṇa* i.e., eye glances, six *sthānai* i.e., stand postures, two or three kinds of *gati* i.e., gait, eight *rasas* i.e., aesthetic sentiments, three kinds of *gītavādītrādīlaya* i.e., vocal and instrumental music.<sup>13</sup> These art forms and dancing postures are mentioned in Bharatamuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*. Like the *Ubhayābhicārikā*, the *Nāṭyaśāstra* also refers to four kinds of acting<sup>14</sup>. But in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the varieties of *nṛttahastas*<sup>15</sup> are found to be varied in a less or more number depending upon the text-critical editions which are distinctly mentioned in the *Ubhayābhicārikā* as thirty-two. The *Saṅgītaratnākara* and *Nṛttaratnāvalī* also have stated about thirty kinds of *nṛttahastas*.<sup>16</sup> Again, the *Ubhayābhicārikā* mentions eighteen kinds of eye-glances which are stated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as thirty-six in number. According to Bharatamuni, amongst the thirty-six kinds<sup>17</sup> of eye glances, eight are called *rasadr̥ṣṭi*, another eight are called *sthāyibhāvadṛṣṭi* and the remaining twenty are named as *vyabhicāribhāvadṛṣṭi* which are said to have express different *rasas*, *sthāyibhāvas* and *vyabhicāribhāvas* respectively.<sup>18</sup> Six kinds of *sthāna* i.e., standing postures are mentioned by the *Ubhayābhicārikā* which are also

<sup>3</sup> gītartyavādyatrayaṁ darśanārthe kṛtāmsaṅgītakamabhidhīyate / *Kādambarī*, Kathāmukha, p.20

<sup>4</sup> bhagavatonārāyaṇasyabhavanemadanāsenayomadanārādhanaṁ saṅgītakaḥ ..... / *Ubhayābhicārikā*, pp.122-123

<sup>5</sup> ...bhagavato' pratihataśāsanasyakusumapurapurandarasyabhavanepurandaravijayam nāmasaṅgītakayathārasābhinayam abhineta vyayamiti ... / *Ibid.*, pp.141-142

<sup>6</sup> ...devadattayāsahame paṇitaḥ samvṛtāḥ / *Ubhayābhicārikā*, p.142

<sup>7</sup> ...svayamārabdhāmṛdaṅgavādyahsaṅgītakaprasaṅgena / *Kādambarī*, Kathāmukha, p.20

<sup>8</sup> aye sūnyeyamasmat saṅgītakaśālā / kva nu gatāḥ kuṣīlavābhaviśyanti / *Mṛcchakaṭika*, p.8

<sup>9</sup> kṛtāṁ ca saṅgītakaṁ mayā / anenaciraṁ saṅgītopāsanena grīṣmasamayā ... / *Ibid.*, p.10

<sup>10</sup> M. Monier Williams, A Sanskrit-English dictionary, p.1129

<sup>11</sup> ..... puruṣaḥ sandiṣṭaiva madanena nāvya kṛtā kākālī racanāmūrchanāṁ vīṇāṁ kṛtvā ime vaktrāparavaktre gāyana tikrāntaḥ / *Ubhayābhicārikā*, p.144

<sup>12</sup> kākalītu kale sūkṣmedhvanautumadhurā sphuṭe / *Amarakośa*, I.7.1

<sup>13</sup> *Ubhayābhicārikā*, p.142

<sup>14</sup> āṅgikavācikaścaivahyāhāryaḥ sātvikastathā / catvāro' bhinayāhyete vijñeyānāṭyasaṁśrayāḥ / *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 6.24

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.11-17

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol II. p.389

<sup>17</sup> śatṛiṁśatdṛṣṭayohyetātāsunaṭyāṁ pratiṣṭhitam / *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 8.44

<sup>18</sup> *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 8.40-44

mentioned as six by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>19</sup> The *bhāṇa* has mentioned three gatis i.e., gaits or the manner of walking for the actors which are also prescribed by Bharatamuni as *sthita*, *madhya* and *druta*<sup>20</sup> for three categories of actors *uttama*, *madhyama* and *adhama* respectively.<sup>21</sup> The works of Sanskrit dramaturgy generally accept eight varieties of sentiments that are applied for acting purposes including Bharatmuni's *Nāṭyaśāstra*.<sup>22</sup> At the age of the *Ubhayābhisārikā* also, these eight varieties of aesthetic sentiments were accepted for the acting performances. Along with these, music, instruments and rhythm are also considered as the constituents of dance that glorify the beauty of Priyaṅgusena.

### Dress:

As the poet describes the city life of Kusumapura in the *Ubhayābhisārikābhāṇa*, people enjoyed wearing costly dresses. Women particularly chose bright coloured attires.<sup>23</sup> *pelavāṁśuka*,<sup>24</sup> *ardhoru*<sup>25</sup> are some kinds of the dresses that are referred to by Vararuci in this *bhāṇa*. *Pelavāṁśuka* is a lightweight silk dress. This kind of cloth also has been found in the *Dhūrtaviṭadamaṁvādabhāṇa* and made an explanation on it. *Ardhoru* is a type of short dress ending above the knee<sup>26</sup>. The *Amarakośa* mentions the same by the name of *Ardhoruka*<sup>27</sup>.

### Ornaments:

Women consider jewellery as an integral component that enhances their beauty and style. There are many references to the ornaments in the *Ubhayābhisārikābhāṇa* which were mostly worn by the women. Women used to decorate themselves with costly jewels engraving *ratnas* i.e., precious stones<sup>28</sup>. Vararuci mentions the ornaments like *raśanā*,<sup>29</sup>

*mekhalā*<sup>30</sup>, *hāra*<sup>31</sup>. *Raśanā* and *mekhalā* both are ornamented waist belts worn by ancient Indian women. The *Amarakośa* mentions five kinds of waist belts viz., *mekhalā*, *kāñcīsaptakīraśanā* and *sārasana*<sup>32</sup>. The *Padmaprābhṛtakabhāṇa* also has the reference of the waist belt *mekhalā*.<sup>33</sup> Again, *hāra* is a chain of pearls as mentioned in the *Amarakośa*.<sup>34</sup> Flowers are always used as an important ornament for decoration. In the *Ubhayābhisārikā* also, the poets cite that varieties of flowers were especially used to decorate hair<sup>35</sup>.

### Cosmetics:

In the age of the *Ubhayābhisārikā*, cosmetics like *haricandana*,<sup>36</sup> *gandhataila*, *aṅgarāga*<sup>37</sup> were used by the people. *Haricandana* is one of the five divine trees according to the *Amarakośa*<sup>38</sup>. It is a yellow and fragrant sort of sandal wood.<sup>39</sup> Candana i.e., sandal is used both as a cosmetic and medicine. As a cosmetic, it reduces itching, body odour, skin complexion, cleanses wounds and many more<sup>40</sup>. *Haricandana* is used both as paste and fragrant oil. The *Rtusamhāra* possess many references of *candana* being used as cosmetics by women<sup>41</sup>. People used *gandhatailā* i.e., fragrant oil as a perfume to freshen up the body. *Aṅgarāga* is an application of unguents or scented cosmetics to the body especially after bathing.<sup>42</sup> It is a composition of fragrant ingredients like *candana*, flowers as stated in the *Raghuvamśa*<sup>43</sup>. *Aṅgarāga* and *gandhataila* were used as preliminaries to bath. *Aṅgarāga* i.e., the paste was generally prepared out of plants while *gandhataila* i.e., fragrant oil was extracted from different seeds and fruits.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>19</sup> vaiṣṇavaṁsamapādamcavaiśākhaṁmaṇḍalamtathā / pratyālīḍhamtathālīḍhamsthānānyetāniṣaṇṇam // *Nāṭyaśāstra*, 10.51

<sup>20</sup> sthitāmadhyamdrutamcaivasamavekṣyalayatrayam / yathāprakṛitinātyajñogatiamevaṁprajayet // *Ibid.*, 12.12

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.13

<sup>22</sup> śṛṅgārahāsyakarūṇāraudravīrabhayānakāḥ / bībhatsādbhūtasamjñaucaṭyaṣṭaunātyerasāḥsmṛtāḥ // *Ibid.*, 6.16

<sup>23</sup> .....vastrojjvalaiḥ // *Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.125

<sup>24</sup> pravālamuktāmanīraśanādukūlapelavāṁśukahāraharicanānādināmvardhatesaubhāgyam / *Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.122

<sup>25</sup> suślakṣṇārdhorukavastrāṁ... *Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.141

<sup>26</sup> *Caturbhāṇī*, word index, p.281

<sup>27</sup> ardhorukamvarastrīṇāmsyāccaṇḍātakamastriyām / *Amarakośa*, 2.6.119

<sup>28</sup> śrīmadratnavibhūṣaṇāṅgaracanaiḥ... *Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.125

<sup>29</sup> ...vyapagataraśanā... *Ibid.*, p.141

<sup>30</sup> ... navyākulāmekhalā // *Ibid.*, p.128

<sup>31</sup> ...hāraharicandanādīnāmvardhatesaubhāgyam / *Ibid.*, p.122

<sup>32</sup> strīkaṭyāṁmekhalākāñcīsaptakīraśanātathākībesārasana ca / *Amarakośa*, II.6.108

<sup>33</sup> pāñibhyāmyenasampratyanucitaśithilāṁmekhalāmudvahāmi / *Padmaprābhṛtaka*, p.46

<sup>34</sup> hāromuktāvalī / *Amarakośa*, II.6.105

<sup>35</sup> .....vivīdhakusumāmaṁkṛtakeśahastā... *Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.143

<sup>36</sup> ...hāraharicandanādīnāmvardhatesaubhāgyam // *Ibid.*, p.122

<sup>37</sup> ..... gandhatailāṅgarā... // *Ibid.*, p.141

<sup>38</sup> pañcaite devataravomandārahapārijātakahsaṁtānaḥkalpavṛkṣaścapuṁsivāharicandanam / *Amarakośa*, II.1.50

<sup>39</sup> www.wisdomlib.org/definition/haricandana

<sup>40</sup> www.easyayurveda.com

<sup>41</sup> *Rtusamhāra*, I.2, II.21, IV.6,

<sup>42</sup> M.MonierWilliam, A Sanskrit English Dictionary, p.7

<sup>43</sup> puṣpagandhenaṅgarāgeṇa... / *Raghuvamśa*, XII.27

<sup>44</sup> Rajaram Narayan Saletore, *Life in the Gupta Age*, p.415



### Gambling:

In ancient India, gambling acquires a special place in the lives of the city dwellers. People got addicted to gambling and they staked everything in that. The *Ubhayābhisārikā* pictures a character named Dhanamitra, the son of a merchant <sup>45</sup> who loses everything and becomes penniless. <sup>46</sup>Viṭa assumes the reasons behind Dhanamitra's misfortune as either he was attacked by bandits or got addicted to gambling.

Fine arts such as dance, drama, music, sports, paintings appear to be very popular during the age of the *Ubhayābhisārikā*. Along with men, women also practised these art forms on a habitual basis.

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<sup>45</sup>pārthakasārthavāhaputrodhanamitronanubhavān  
/...*Ubhayābhisārikā*, p.138

<sup>46</sup>athabhṛtyārthisambandhisuhrjnadāridrayatamopahasya  
.....*Ubhayābhisārikā*/p.138